



American Forest Resource Council
5100 S.W. Macadam Avenue, Suite 350
Portland, Oregon 97239

Phone: (503) 222-9505
Fax: (503) 222-3255
E-mail: info@amforest.org
www.amforest.org



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Washington, D.C. Updates

Congress is set to return to Washington after the Labor Day weekend, which marks the end of its traditional August recess. After spending much of the summer focused on the ill-fated effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Republican leaders will face a new round of fiscal cliff debates to keep the government funded past September and increase the debt limit. Conservatives in the House and Senate are threatening to vote against an increase in the debt limit unless it is coupled with major fiscal reforms.

Adopting new appropriations measures for Fiscal Year 2018 will also be challenging given continued pressure from fiscal hawks to reduce spending and the delays caused by the Presidential Transition. President Trump has also threatened to let the government shut down if Congress does not fund the construction of a wall along on the U.S. - Mexico border. Republicans, who control the House, Senate, and White House, could suffer significant political damage if a crisis unfolds in Washington affecting the economy.

AFRC will continue advocating for increased funding and oversight needed to grow the Forest Service and BLM timber management programs, both of which generally enjoy bipartisan support. The tight fiscal environment makes securing increased funding for these programs difficult, despite the fact that these agencies could be generating significant revenue for the U.S. Treasury, counties, and for restoration and forest health treatments – which in turn would reduce the \$2 billion the federal government spends fighting wildfires each year.

New Chief Named. On August 18, Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell announced that he would be retiring following a 40-year career with the Forest Service, including over eight years as Chief. Three days later the Administration announced that Tony Tooke, the current regional forester for the Southern Region (Region Nine), would begin serving as Chief on September 1.

Prior to serving as regional forester, Tooke served in various positions on forests across the Southern US and in the Washington Office, including associate deputy chief for the National Forest System, Director for Ecosystem Management Coordination (EMC), and assistant director for Forest Management. While his career has largely been spent in the Eastern United States, his experience in the forest management and EMC offices give him a good background to understand the planning and litigation challenges facing forests in the West. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue issued a statement on Tooke's selection as chief, including:

“He will oversee efforts to get our forests working again, to make them more productive, and to create more jobs. His focus will be on ensuring we are good neighbors and are managing our

forests effectively, efficiently, and responsibly, as well as working with states and local governments to ensure the utmost collaboration.”

There is still no word from the Administration on a nominee for the USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, the principal political appointee setting policy direction for the Forest Service. Once a nominee is named that individual will be subject to Senate confirmation, which has been a time-consuming process thus far for Trump Administration political appointees. /Heath Heikkila

Interior Secretary Zinke Submits Monument Report to President Trump

August 24 was the deadline for Secretary Ryan Zinke’s report to President Trump regarding his review of 27 national monuments created under the Antiquities Act. While the Department of the Interior provided a [press release](#) and brief [summary](#) of the process, the full report will not be released until the White House has time to review and consider the recommendations. There currently is no timeline for when the report will be released.

However, there are indications the report will include favorable recommendations related to the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM). The Washington Post reported the CSNM is likely one of the few national monuments Secretary Zinke recommended be reduced or modified. In the summary report, there was at least an indirect mention of the CSNM and O&C: “Other monuments remain controversial and contain significant private property within the identified external boundary or overlap with other Federal land designations such as national forests, Wilderness Study Areas, and lands specifically set aside by Congress for timber production.”

AFRC, Murphy Company, and the Association of O&C Counties have all filed lawsuits challenging President Obama’s inclusion of O&C lands in the expansion of the CSNM, which is in direct conflict with the clear legal requirement that these lands be managed for “permanent forest production.” Those lawsuits were placed on hold until Zinke’s review was complete.

In a related development, prior to the completion of the Antiquities Act report, AFRC sent a [letter](#) to Secretary Zinke citing a 1990 law that reaffirms the view that Congress did expressly reserve the O&C lands for timber production, a position that was also supported by a 1940 Interior Solicitor’s Opinion. The 1990 law (PL 101-419), transferred about 40 acres of O&C lands from the federal government to the Rogue Community College District in Josephine County. The General Services Administration (GSA) had determined that it did not have the statutory authority to redesignate and transfer O&C lands. As the 1990 legislation’s sponsor, Senator Mark Hatfield, stated, “the GSA [w]as unable to implement the transfer and sale due to the property’s special designation as O&C land.”

Secretary Zinke deserves significant credit for his national monument review, which has come under criticism from national environmental organizations. Secretary Zinke actually toured the CSNM and met with elected officials and stakeholders on both sides of the issue, which former Interior Secretary Sally Jewel never did in the Obama Administration’s rush to expand the

monument before leaving office. AFRC staff will provide a more detailed analysis and commentary once Secretary Zinke's report is released to the public. /Heath Heikkila

AFRC Submits Protest to BLM Project

In 2012 the BLM released an [RMP Evaluation Report](#) on the implementation of what then was their current Resource Management Plan (RMP). The purpose of this report was to determine whether the plan was being implemented appropriately. One factor considered was whether the plan was being implemented consistently with the mandates of the O&C Lands Act and its requirement to manage timber resources in conformity with the principles of sustained-yield. The report included the following findings pertaining to this mandate:

- The determination of the ASQ is based upon an assumed, mix, intensity and cycle of regeneration and thinning harvest. Adherence to the principles of sustained yield, at the declared ASQ harvest level, is based on implementation of these assumptions.
- Regeneration harvest conducted today provides the stands available for thinning in the future. Inability to implement regeneration harvest reduces thinning opportunities in the future.
- The BLM has generally avoided regeneration harvest, especially regeneration harvest of older forest. This has implications for the sustainability of timber harvest and has effectively reduced the land available for harvest from what was assumed by the 1995 RMP determination of the ASQ.

In essence, the BLM realized in 2012 that they were not managing their lands in conformance with the principles of sustained yield. This fact was summarized accordingly: “Accelerated rates of thinning without replenishment of younger forest stands through regeneration harvest means that opportunities for thinning will eventually be exhausted. The current approach to a forest management regime that deviates so considerably from the RMP assumptions used in determination of the ASQ is **not sustainable** at the declared ASQ level.”

These determinations were realized after almost twenty years of flawed implementation. The BLM released a new RMP in 2016. The mandate for management in conformance with the principles of sustained yield has not changed. The question on AFRC's mind is: has the BLM's approach to meeting this mandate changed since the publication of the Evaluation Report in 2012? More importantly—has the BLM learned and acknowledged that deviating from RMP assumptions used in determination of the ASQ is **not sustainable**?

If the first Environmental Assessment (EA) released under the 2016 RMPs is any indication, then the answer to these questions is no. The Elk Camel (EA) was published this summer by the Medford BLM District. Throughout the planning process for this project AFRC urged the District to closely consider the vegetation modeling effort put forth under these RMPs that serve as the basis for calculation of the District's ASQ. Lack of such a close consideration would lead to the “deviation” described in the BLM's 2012 RMP Evaluation Report that led the agency to conclude that their current management approach was “not sustainable.”

The EA that was released this summer had no reference to the vegetation models used to calculate the District's ASQ. After close review, AFRC determined that several planned harvest

treatments were in conflict with those models. In response to our concern that such treatments would cause a deviation from the assumptions made in the 2016 RMPs and thus hinder the BLM's ability to manage based on the principles of sustained yield, the BLM stated in its Decision Record (DR) that:

- The vegetation modeling in the PRMP/FEIS is not in itself management direction
- Many different approaches would lead to similar outcomes

In light of the insights provided by the 2012 RMP Evaluation Report and what appears, based on the Elk Camel DR, to be a clear disregard for what the BLM supposedly learned from that report, AFRC has opted to submit a formal protest of this DR. It is not common practice for AFRC to submit to this burdensome process in order to express our concerns. However, at the same time, AFRC is unwilling to sit idly by and allow the BLM to make the same mistakes they made for nearly twenty years under their previous management plan all over again. */Andy Geissler*

In Landmark Decision, Ninth Circuit Upholds A to Z Project

On August 1, in a unanimous [decision](#), a Ninth Circuit panel upheld the denial of an injunction against the [North Fork Mill Creek](#) "A to Z" project on the Colville National Forest. The project aims to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration on the Colville National Forest while enhancing recreation and wildlife habitat and supporting jobs in local communities. The project covers 12,000 acres of dense forests, will implement commercial treatments including thinning and shelterwood harvest on over 4,500 acres, and aims to produce approximately 38 million board feet (MMBF), all of which is additive to the Colville's timber program. This is a result of the project's [innovative contract structure](#), where the contractor provided support for consultants to prepare NEPA documentation for the Forest Service's review and approval.

An environmental litigant group filed suit to stop project implementation, putting local forestry jobs at risk and threatening curtailment of the Vaagen Bros.' mill in Usk, Washington. AFRC intervened in the case on behalf of Stevens County, Pend Oreille County and the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC). NEWFC is a collaborative group that has worked on the Colville since 2002 and includes representatives from conservation groups, tribes, local businesses and AFRC members including Vaagen Bros. and Columbia Cedar.

The U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington initially denied a preliminary injunction in October 2016 and the Ninth Circuit then denied an emergency injunction pending appeal. ([November 2016 Newsletter](#)). The litigant group continued the appeal of the preliminary injunction in the Ninth Circuit, which was [argued](#) in June before Ninth Circuit Judges Milan Smith, Morgan Christen, and Dorothy Nelson. AFRC argued on behalf of the intervening parties.

The Ninth Circuit panel denied injunctive relief to halt the project and rejected each of the group's claims, finding there was not a likelihood of success, "much less" serious questions on the merits of the claims. The court noted that this is a forest restoration project and "was the result of a multi-year collaboration among elected officials, environmental organizations, Native American tribes, the timber industry, and community organizations."

The court first affirmed the Forest Service’s use of marten habitat as a proxy for monitoring the species. It noted that the Forest Plan does not require monitoring of the marten, that the Forest Service had adequate knowledge of the status of the species, and had sufficiently established the difficulty of monitoring. For similar reasons, the use of pine marten as a proxy for fisher was upheld. Next, the court upheld the Forest Service’s analysis of big game cover, rejecting AWR’s reliance on its own study to dispute the Forest Service’s conclusions. It reaffirmed precedent on this point: “A party challenging the Forest Service’s scientific analysis cannot simply ‘cite studies that support a conclusion different from the one the Forest Service reached’ and must instead provide ‘scientific studies that indicate the Forest Service’s analysis is outdated or flawed.’” The court found that new temporary roads did not undermine the agency’s conclusion that the project complied with the Forest Plan standards for road density.

Finally, the panel concluded that the agency appropriately found no significant sediment impacts after analyzing the net sediment effects. It found that mitigation does not have to be complete to justify a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), which permits the agency to use an EA rather than an EIS. The court did not reach the harm, balance of equities, or public interest factors. Since this decision addresses whether a preliminary injunction should issue, there will be another hearing in the future on summary judgment. However, no summary judgment schedule has been set.

AFRC’s [press release](#) stated: “We are pleased that the Ninth Circuit recognized this important forest restoration project complied with federal environmental law. As evidenced by the project’s support from industry, the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, and Pend Oreille and Stevens Counties, there is a broad and growing consensus that our National Forests need active management.” AFRC’s General Counsel added, “This decision is a big win for forest restoration. AFRC was glad to step up and join our partners and defend the Forest Service in this case. We encourage other National Forests to follow the example of the Colville National Forest.” The U.S. Attorney’s office also issued a [press release](#).

The decision was covered by the [Spokesman-Review](#) and by [Evergreen Magazine](#), which described this ruling as part of an ongoing “sea change in how federal judges view collaborative forest restoration projects.”

AFRC appreciates the support of our collaborative and County partners in this pathbreaking case.
/Lawson Fite

AFRC Files an Amicus Brief in the U.S. Supreme Court

On August 14, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and AFRC submitted an “friends of the court” [amicus curiae brief](#) to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Markle Interests, LLC. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife*, a critical habitat case out of the Fifth Circuit. This case involves critical habitat designation for unoccupied habitat for the Mississippi gopher frog under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a decision that will have a detrimental effect on private landowners.

In 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Mississippi gopher frog as an endangered species. The frog was only known to exist in Harrison County, Mississippi. The FWS later designated critical habitat for the frog, including a 1,500-acre unit of privately owned

land in St. Tammy Parish, Louisiana (Unit 1) as unoccupied critical habitat under ESA. Unoccupied habitat may be designated for areas that are “essential for the conservation of the species.” In making such a designation, FWS determined that private landowners would face an economic impact of \$33.9 million over 20 years. This figure represents a loss in residential and commercial development opportunities, but does not account for the lost option on foreseeable oil and gas development, mineral development, timber harvest, and recreational use or hunting leases.

Markle Interests and other landowners of Unit 1 that are involved in timber operations and commercial development challenged the critical habitat designation, alleging that Unit 1 was not essential for the conservation of the frog because it is not currently habitable, is not “currently supporting the conservation of the species in any way,” and is not reasonably likely to support the conservation of the species in the “foreseeable future.” The landowners also argued that the FWS’s critical habitat designation was arbitrary and capricious because the benefits of excluding Unit 1 from the designation clearly outweigh the benefits of including it in the designation. The ESA mandates that FWS take into consideration the economic impact of a particular critical habitat designation and the agency may exclude areas if it determines that the benefits of such exclusions outweigh the benefits of keeping the lands within the designation.

In a [2-1 split opinion](#), the Fifth Circuit determined that FWS’s critical habitat designation was entitled to deference, despite the concession that the frog did not occupy the site, the site cannot sustain the frog, and that changes would have to be made to make Unit 1 habitable in the foreseeable future. The Fifth Circuit also rejected the landowners disproportionate impact argument because it determined that FWS’s decision to exclude designation of critical habitat based on economic impact is discretionary and “unreviewable.” The court maintained that ESA’s mandate is only the consideration of economic impacts, which FWS satisfied by issuing an economic report.

The petition for rehearing *en banc* was [denied](#). However, six judges dissented and called for review because the Fifth Circuit panel’s decision gave the government “virtually limitless” power to designate critical habitat and “the ramifications of this decision for national land use regulation and for judicial review of agency action cannot be underestimated.”

The private landowners, including Markle Interests, have filed a petition for certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court challenging the “land grab” resulting from the Fifth Circuit’s majority opinion. Weyerhaeuser, which owns a timber lease on the land, also petitioned for certiorari. A total of 13 amicus briefs, including NAHB and AFRC’s brief, representing 19 different organizations and 18 different states, also urged the Supreme Court to grant review of this troubling expansion of FWS’s narrowly delegated authority and to hold that private property cannot be deemed critical habitat under the ESA if the species does not use (and can never use) the property without changes made by the property owner.

In our amicus brief, we argued that (1) the Fifth Circuit’s approach improperly applied scientific deference to the legal question of what qualifies as “unoccupied habitat”; (2) the FWS’s designation of unoccupied habitat will inflict severe costs on landowners and average citizens with no benefit to the frog; and (3) the petition raises important questions of the non-delegation

doctrine, whether Congress delegated its authority to FWS without providing standards to which an agency must conform in violation of Article I of the U.S. Constitution. Notably, the brief highlights that the “unprecedented and sweeping” interpretation of unoccupied habitat will be economically disastrous for industries that are dependent on public lands, using the designation of critical habitat of the northern spotted owl as an example.

Without a more demanding and narrow interpretation of unoccupied habitat, FWS would be free to designate any lands with little physical or biological features essential to a species’ conservation – a boundless authority in conflict with the ESA.

We expect a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court of whether to grant certiorari by the end of October. AFRC appreciates the support of NABH and attorneys Jeff Augello and Thomas Ward in this case. /Sara Ghafouri

Farm Bill CE Survives First Test in Sunny South Case

On August 16, Judge Vince Chhabria, of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco, issued an important favorable decision in the challenge to the Sunny South Project on the Tahoe National Forest. AFRC intervened in the case on behalf of Sierra Pacific Industries, which purchased the timber.

This case is the first to challenge the use of the insect and disease categorical exclusion (CE) under the 2014 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill CE authorizes projects to treat up to 3,000 acres in designated areas without preparing an EA or EIS. It also authorizes the Chief of the Forest Service to designate additional eligible areas.

The project took place in a Chief-designated area, so the plaintiffs alleged that a separate NEPA process was required for the designation. Such a ruling would have undermined the usefulness of the Farm Bill CE, entangling projects in repetitive NEPA loops. Fortunately, the Judge determined that the designation of a landscape under the Farm Bill does not require its own NEPA process. This was based on two main grounds. First, that a designation does not authorize any activity or identify a concrete proposal, so it is not subject to NEPA, and second requiring NEPA for such a designation would undermine the whole point of the Farm Bill, which is to accelerate needed treatments.

AFRC and the Forest Service argued that the agency did not have to do an “extraordinary circumstances” memo to invoke the CE. The Judge was not convinced by that, but he did not decide the issue given the extensive memo prepared by the Forest Service. He affirmed the Forest Service’s finding that there are no extraordinary circumstances despite short-term impacts on California spotted owls.

With forest health continuing to decline throughout the West, this decision strengthens a very useful tool in the agency’s toolbox. /Lawson Fite

A New Runway Doesn't Need an EIS. Why Should a Timber Sale?

The Ninth Circuit's decision in [Barnes v. FAA](#) upheld an agency finding that constructing a new airport runway does not require an EIS. This is a stark contrast to recent district court decisions requiring an EIS for modest forestry projects, such as the Goose Project which would conduct largely thinning treatment on 2,100 acres, or the White Castle timber sale involving 187 acres of variable retention harvest. Unsurprisingly, the effects of a major construction project exceed the effects of these modest projects. Construction also involves dealing with air quality issues where there is more uncertainty than any analysis of the effects of standard forestry techniques. This case shows just how far NEPA decisions on forestry have departed from the law.

In terms of airport operations (the number of takeoffs and landings), Hillsboro Airport has been Oregon's busiest airport since 2008. To create the capacity for continued growth, the Port of Portland began planning to add a [new runway](#), measuring 3,600 feet long (0.7 miles) and 60 feet wide. The project also includes construction of taxiways, relocation of a helipad, and associated infrastructure improvements. The new runway would slightly increase storm water runoff, impact some 70 acres of vegetation, result in permanent loss of 2.22 acres of wetlands, affect some 50 acres of prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance, and raise electricity use slightly. After a remand from a first round of litigation, the Port and the FAA produced an EA which predicted that Hillsboro would have 11,350 more takeoffs and landings each year with the new runway than it would without the new runway. The EA estimated that the new runway would result in the annual emission of an additional 0.03 ton of lead in 2016 and the annual emission of an additional 0.02 ton of lead in 2021 – an increase of four percent. The project budget is approximately \$16.5 million.

Environmental groups petitioned for review in the Ninth Circuit, claiming that the construction of the runway required an EIS. The court, in the [first round](#) of litigation, rejected claims that uncertainty of climate change effects required an EIS. It noted that there is not substantial scientific uncertainty relating to the causal connection between greenhouse gas emissions and global warming. However, the Court found because Hillsboro “represents less than 1 percent of U.S. aviation activity, greenhouse emissions associated with existing and future aviation activity at HIO are expected to represent less than 0.03 percent of U.S.-based greenhouse gases. Because this percentage does not translate into locally-quantifiable environmental impacts given the global nature of climate change, the EA's discussion of the project's in terms of percentages is adequate.” It also held that the decision did not create “precedent” that a runway does not require an EIS because runway EAs are site-specific.

In the second round of litigation, the court rejected arguments that effects from increased lead emissions would present unique risks due to effects on children's health, or that effects were highly controversial or uncertain, because the FAA and the Port had quantified the “*de minimis*” increase in emissions. By contrast, district courts in Oregon have found “significant” effects requiring an EIS even in a project, such as White Castle, that would take *no* northern spotted owls.

Barnes was the right decision and it shows the path forward the Ninth Circuit can and should take in evaluating forestry projects. /*Lawson Fite*

Board of Natural Resources Holds Retreat

Typically, August is an off month for the Washington State Board of Natural Resources. While the Board has the option to hold a retreat and/or special meeting during August, it has often taken the month off. However, this year a retreat was held August 17 and 18 in Pacific and Wahkiakum Counties. The purpose was to highlight some of the issues the Board will be dealing with as they move towards selecting a Preferred Alternative for the Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy (LTCS).

Day one was a field tour with stops in Pacific and Wahkiakum Counties. In attendance were Board members Hilary Franz, Bill Peach, Elizabeth Van Volkenburgh, and Chris Reykdal. Stop one was in the Nemah Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) to look at occupied marbled murrelet habitat. The Nemah NRCA totals 2,440 acres and was designated as occupied habitat due to two nest sites located within the NRCA in the mid-1990's. The NRCA contains a mix of stand types, including second growth, and patches of 300-year old western red cedar and Sitka spruce. At this stop a discussion about the characteristics of "high quality" habitat took place. The stand consisting of residual trees from past harvest and natural disturbance has developed into a multistory canopy. Many of the residual trees have formed the characteristics of a suitable nest tree under the 1997 HCP, of large limbs or other structures over 7 inches in diameter and at least 50 feet or greater above the ground.

Stop two was in the rock pit atop Radar Ridge. From this vantage point, the group had a broad view of the landscape around the NRCA. Impacts from the Great Coastal Gale of 2007 could be seen on both DNR trust lands and private land. The third stop was the Western Lake Campground, where the Board heard about the impacts recreation sites can have on the marbled murrelet and the impacts the LTCS will have on current and future recreation opportunities. There are currently two options proposed in the LTCS which will limit or prevent the development or expansion of recreation facilities, trails or recreational leases.

Stop four was at an occupied site of what DNR termed lower quality habitat. Here the group heard about the real economic impacts Wahkiakum and Pacific Counties are experiencing and expect to have depending on which LTCS alternative the Board selects. The average annual distribution of timber revenues between 2011 and 2015 for Pacific and Wahkiakum counties has been \$1,893,294 and \$1,610,234 respectively. Wahkiakum County reports expecting only \$43,000 in revenue from DNR timber sales in 2018. The Board heard from Wahkiakum County Commissioner Dan Cothren and Pacific County Commissioner Lisa Ayers about the ongoing budget impacts the lack of management on DNR trust lands is causing for their counties. They related ongoing budget cuts on top of budget cuts, which is impacting the ability to provide basic services.

The final stop of the day was to talk about riparian management options and arrearage options in the Sustainable Harvest Calculation (SHC) planning effort. An explanation about what is required for DNR to conduct riparian management under their Riparian Forest Restoration Strategy (RFRS) was presented to the Board by local management foresters. Staff also shared how under-performance in implementing the RFRS led to a portion of the arrearage under consideration in the SHC DEIS.

Day two was a workshop format with the Board discussing many of the topics they had seen the previous day. The Board was joined by members Ron Mittelhammer and JT Austin. Discussions were held on social-economic impacts to rural communities under this planning effort, how risk and mitigation were factored into the development of the various DEIS alternatives, concepts about looking for legislative remedies for trust beneficiaries, and how mitigation was discounted over time. Topics of arrearage and riparian management were also raised. The Board asked about which arrearage number, 702 vs. 462, was appropriate under policy and statute. With time running out on the agenda, further discussion about riparian management was tabled for the September Board meeting.

The meeting concluded with the Board asking staff to develop three additional marbled murrelet alternatives: one that meters take more broadly over time, one that meters take more geographically over time, and one that is more strategic in future habitat placement considering trust impacts. Staff stated that it will take time to verify if they meet the Needs, Purpose, and Objectives of the project and to develop the analysis of the new alternatives. An initial report from staff regarding these alternatives is expected at the September Board meeting. */Matt Comisky*

Region 1 on Fire

There are currently nine wildfires burning in Forest Service Region 1 that are 1,000 acres or larger in size. Eight are burning in Montana and one in Idaho. Total acres burned now tops 167,000. The Lolo National Forest is the most impacted with four large fires burning including the Sapphire Complex, 39,189 acres; Lolo Peak, 37,246 acres; Sunrise, 25,761 acres; and Rice Ridge, 22,405 acres. Together these four fires have burned nearly 125,000 acres.

In an effort to provide timely updates, Region 1 staff have been holding conference calls with the forest products industry to outline fire containment efforts, opportunities for removal of sawlogs and pulp logs that have been decked from fire line construction, and possible areas suitable for post fire salvage including high priority timbered areas that are located on lands classified as a suitable land base for timber harvest. The first conference call was held on August 17 and another is scheduled for September 1.

Besides the obvious impacts these wildfires have to forest resources, and the enormous amount of money it takes to pay for the manpower and equipment needed to extinguish the fires, future management opportunities are set back as well. For example, on the Lolo, one of next areas the Forest had been planning to enter was the Quartz-Trout Project Area which contains stands of timber that average as much as 20,000 board feet per acre. However, much of this proposed planning area has been impacted by the Sunrise Fire. Hopefully, short-term salvage volume will help make up the volume that would have been generated in the Quartz-Trout project.

The tragedy remains that the Forest Service's pace and scale for getting management across the landscape to protect these forests from wildfire is still lagging. Every year one or more forests seem to be at ground zero for catastrophic wildfires and this year one of them is the Lolo. We certainly hope that containment and restoration comes sooner than later, and salvage efforts are swift. */Tom Partin*

Oregon is on Fire

More than a dozen wildfires are still burning throughout Oregon – wreaking havoc on state and federal resources; putting communities and public health at risk; and devastating habitat, wildlife, watersheds, recreational opportunities, and forest resources.

By the end of August, Oregon wildfires had already burned up more than 300,000 acres – or approximately 470 square miles mostly of public land. The cost to state and federal taxpayers has topped \$100,000,000 in Oregon alone. The cost does not include \$14.3 million spent by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

According to fire officials, a 20-person handcrew costs state and federal agencies about \$10,000 per day. A helicopter costs \$6,000 per day to have available and \$1,800 per hour to fly. A typical load of fire retardant dropped from a tanker costs about \$20,000.

The largest fire in Oregon is the Chetco Bar Fire near Brookings, which has burned more than 100,000 acres. The fire was started by lightning on July 12 and was initially reported as a ¼ acre fire burning in the 2002 Biscuit Fire and 1987 Silver Fire scars located in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

According to InciWeb, the Chetco Bar “is burning in areas of fire scar and islands that were previously unburned. The combination of down, dead fuels with newly cured grass makes the terrain quite hazardous for firefighters.” Nearly 1,500 personnel are working on the fire with an estimated containment date still six weeks away: October 15.

Another lightning caused fire complex, the High Cascades Complex, consists of 20 individual fires located within Crater Lake National Park, the Rogue River/Siskiyou National Forest, the Umpqua National Forest, and the Fremont-Winema National Forest. Thirteen of these fires have been contained while seven are being managed with a full suppression strategy. The High Cascades Complex has already burned 21,432 acres and is only 38 percent contained. More than 600 personnel are working on the fire with an estimated containment date of October 15.

In addition to Southern Oregon fires, more than 30,000 acres of the 1.5 million Willamette National Forest – the closest national forest to the Eugene/Springfield area – have already burned this season. According to the local newspaper, *Register Guard*, the fires are “bringing some of the worst air conditions in years to the southern Willamette Valley.” The Eugene/Springfield area recently scored a 223 on the air quality index. The U.S. EPA’s zero-to-500 index measures air quality with higher numbers for worse conditions. Air quality ratings above 200 trigger public alerts, “meaning everyone may experience more serious health effects” according to the EPA. By comparison, unhealthy air quality levels in Beijing, China are currently around 155.

AFRC extends its deepest thanks and gratitude to the brave firefighters working to protect lives, property, and forest resources in these dangerous conditions. /*Travis Joseph*

National Fire Statistics

The current weather forecast is for high pressure to continue over the West which will keep hot and dry conditions in place. Isolated thunderstorms will form over the far southwest deserts and over the mountains of southern California. This forecast does not bode well for wildfire containment efforts in the short-term and new thunderstorm threats mean new fire starts.

Below is the year-to-date fire statistics from the National Interagency Fire Center. While the average number of fires is below the 10-year average, the acres burned is higher thus indicating that the large wildfires are consuming more areas before they are brought under control, due in part to heavier vegetation that hasn't been managed in decades. Until the Forest Service puts more effort into getting larger acreages managed and heavy fuel loadings reduced, we will continue to see the larger mega size wildfire trend continue. /Tom Partin

Year-to-date statistics		
2017 (1/1/17 - 8/28/17)	Fires: 45,598	Acres: 6,758,278
2016 (1/1/16 - 8/28/16)	Fires: 39,734	Acres: 4,465,987
2015 (1/1/15 - 8/28/15)	Fires: 43,396	Acres: 7,825,559
2014 (1/1/14 - 8/28/14)	Fires: 38,236	Acres: 2,709,690
2013 (1/1/13 - 8/28/13)	Fires: 33,945	Acres: 3,686,318
2012 (1/1/12 - 8/28/12)	Fires: 43,932	Acres: 7,277,836
2011 (1/1/11 - 8/28/11)	Fires: 52,556	Acres: 6,857,445
2010 (1/1/10 - 8/28/10)	Fires: 43,249	Acres: 2,578,216
2009 (1/1/09 - 8/28/09)	Fires: 64,380	Acres: 5,222,488
2008 (1/1/08 - 8/28/08)	Fires: 63,945	Acres: 4,549,283
2007 (1/1/07 - 8/28/07)	Fires: 64,796	Acres: 6,890,431
Annual average prior 10 years		
2006-2016	Fires: 48,713	Acres: 5,173,810

Summer Forest and Mill Tours

AFRC staff and members helped organize several tours for elected officials and Congressional staff in August. AFRC believes these events provide a great opportunity to give key decision makers a first-hand view of what our industry does and the many benefits of active forest management of public lands. It also allows our industry to forge deeper relationships outside of the hustle and bustle of D.C. and state capitols.

On August 7, AFRC staff organized a tour with Washington Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, key DNR staff, and AFRC members that focused on opportunities to increase the

harvest of hardwoods from state trust lands. The tour took place on state trust lands southwest of Chehalis in DNR's Pacific Cascade Region. Tour participants discussed issues related to riparian management and the strong demand that exists for the hardwood component of DNR timber sales. Following the forest tour, Commissioner Franz and the group toured Cascade Hardwood's mill in Chehalis.

Congressional staff members from the House Natural Resources Committee, the DC office of Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-OR), and the state office of Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) joined AFRC staff and member company representatives for a mill and forest tour on August 9. The day began with a tour of Interfor's Molalla Division sawmill. The group then proceeded to the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mt. Hood National Forest to view recent and active forest thinning on the Pink and Tuba Timber Sales. The group also viewed an active BLM timber sale (Airstrip thinning project) and a nearby BLM salvage project, which allowed for a comparison between BLM and Forest Service management in the area.

Jay Sandmann from Interfor and Ron Schneider of WKO/High Cascade were fantastic tour guides for the staff and discussed the ecological and economic benefits of implementing heavier-touch treatments on Forest Service lands in Western Oregon and Western Washington, which was supposed to occur under the Northwest Forest Plan. The group spent most of its time touring even-spaced plantation thinning projects on Matrix lands. Unfortunately, smoke from the Whitewater Fire burning near Mt. Jefferson clouded the views and provided a reminder about the consequences of inaction on our federal lands.

On August 14, AFRC staff and member company representatives, local Congressional staff, environmental representatives, and staff from the Olympic National Forest (ONF) toured a proposed project in the lower Skokomish River watershed near Hoodport. The tour was organized through the Olympic Forest Collaborative, which was formed out of meetings with Congressman Derek Kilmer (D-WA) to discuss the need to increase timber harvest levels on the ONF. Field representatives from the offices of Congressman Kilmer and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) joined the group for the day.

Knox Marshall (Murphy Company), Dave Marshall (Sierra Pacific), and Paul Bialkowsky (Interfor) provided great insights into the proposed project, which would include heavy thinning of intermediate age stands and gap removal treatments to address root rot. The project is located within an Adaptive Management Area. Support for these types of treatments has grown within the Olympic Forest Collaborative, which intends to provide increased capacity through the efforts of collaborative members and contractors to generate additive volume beyond the ONF's current timber sale program.

Thanks to the AFRC members who took time to help organize and participate in these events. AFRC plans to organize more of these tours in the coming months for elected officials and staff from federal, state, and county governments to learn more about the benefits of active public forest management. /Heath Heikkila

Job Opportunity: Executive Director, Douglas Timber Operators

Do you want to make a difference in your community? Are you passionate about healthy forests and the renewable forest products industry? Are you looking for a job that will challenge, inspire, and motivate you every day?

[Douglas Timber Operators](#) (DTO) is searching for an Executive Director to carry out its mission to promote responsible timber harvests, restoration, and production of forest products on public and private timberlands in southwestern Oregon. DTO, a community organization established in 1968, is a powerful local voice in advocating for sustainable forest management, educating the public about the forest products industry, and organizing important community and educational events.

The ideal candidate will bring passion, integrity, a positive attitude, and a mission-driven ethic to DTO. The position provides an outstanding opportunity to develop and grow the organization's presence on social media, design and execute a multi-faceted strategic plan, and bring diverse ideas and people together to support a common cause: responsible, sustainable forest management.

The job is located in Roseburg, Oregon and compensation will be commensurate to experience and qualifications. For more information and a full job description please visit [here](#) or email DTO President Gabe Crane (gabec@rfpco.com) or DTO Treasurer John Blodgett (Blodgett.mail@gmail.com).